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THE CAMP FIRES OF THE PIONEERS.

VINCERE EST VIVERE!

BY SAM L. SIMPSON.

[Reprinted from Transactions of Pioneer Association.]

Striking at ease his epic lyre,
The laureled Mantuan has sung
Beleagured Troy's illustrious pyre—
The daring sail Æneas flung
To wayward gales, the voyage long
That tracks the silver wave of song;
Until the worn and weary oar
Has kissed the far Lavinian shore;
The Argo's classic pennon streams
Along sweet horizons of dreams,—
The Mayflower has furled her wings,
And restfully at anchor swings—
Columbia chants to columned seas
The triumph of the Genoese,
And yet, stout hearts, no fitting meed
Of panegyric crowns your deed
From which a stately empire springs.

The minions of a perfumed age
Already crowd upon the stage,—
The massive manhood of the past
In many a graceful mould is cast;
And yet with calm and kindly eyes
You view the feast for others spread,
And hail the blue benignant skies
Resigned and grandly comforted.
It was for this you broke the way
Before the sunset gates of day—
For this, with godlike faith endued,
You scaled the misty crags of fate,
And, with resounding labors, hewed
The Doric pillars of the state.

There is no task for you to do—
Your tents are furled, the bugle blown—
But yet another day, and you
Will live in clustered fame alone.
The fir will chant a song of rue,
The pine will drop a wreath, may be,
And o'er the dim Cascades the stars
Will nightly roll the gleaming cars
You followed well from sea to sea.
Before your scarred battalion's wheel
Into the mystic realm of shade,
And on your grizzled brows the seal
Of mystery is softly laid,

Once more around your old campfires,
That smoulder like fulfilled desires,
Rehearse the story of your toils
Display the hero crowned with spoils—
The glimmer of triumphant steel,
Beneath the garland and the braid.

O, further than the legions bore
The eagles of Imperial Rome—
Three thousand miles, a weary march,
You followed Hesper's golden torch,
Until it stooped on this green shore,
And lit the rosy fires of home.
It was a solemn morn you turned
And quenched the sacred flames that burned
On hearths endeared for years and years;
It seemed your very souls grew dark
With those sweet fires—the latest spark
Was drowned in bitter, bitter tears.
A softer, sweeter sunlight wrapt
The forms of all familiar things,
And as each cord of feeling snapt
Another angel furled its wings:
The lights and shadows in the lane,
The oak beside the foot-worn stile
Whose wheeling shades a weary while
Had told the hours of joy and pain—
The vine that clambered o'er the door
And many a purple cluster bore—
The vestal flowers of household love—
The sloping roof that wore the stain
Of summer sun and winter rain,
And smoky chimney tops above—
The beauty of the orchard trees,
Bedecked with blossoms, glad with bees—
The brook that all the livelong day
Had many things to sing and say—
All these upon your vision dwell
And weave the sorrow of farewell.

And now the last good-bye is said—
Good-bye! the living and the dead
In those sad words together speak,
And all your chosen ways are bleak!
Forward! The cracking lashes send
A thrill of action down the train,—
Their brawny necks the oxen bend
With creaking yoke and clanking chain;
The horsemen gallop down the line,
And swerve around the lowing kine
That straggle loosely on the plain—
And lift glad hands to babes that laugh
And dash the buttercups like chaff.
Hurrah! the skies are jewel blue—
In tasseled green and braided gold
The robes of April are enrolled,

And hopes are high and hearts are true!
Hurrah! hurrah! the bold, the free—
The sudden sweep of ecstacy
That lifts the soul on wings of fire,
When fears consume and doubts expire,
And life, in one red torrent, leaps
To join the march of boundless deeps!

And now the sun is dropping down
And lights and shadows, red and brown
Are weaving sunset's purple spell:
The teams are freed, the fires are made,
Like scarlet night flow'rs in the shade,
And pleasant groups before, between,
Are thronging in the fitful sheen—
The day is done, and "all is well."

So pass the days, so fall the nights;
A banquet of renewed delights;
The old horizons lift and pass
In magic changes like a dream,
And in the heavens' azure glass
Tomorrow's jasper arches gleam—
With many a vale and mountain mass,
And many a singing, shining stream.
The past is dead and daisied now—
In shadow fades from heart and brow—
The air is incense, and the breeze
Is sweet with siren melodies,
And all the castled hills before
In blooming vistas sweep and soar
Like silver lace, the clouds are strewn
Along the distant, dreamy zone;
It is a happy, happy time,
As wayward as a poet's rhyme,
And ever as the sun goes down
The west is shut with rosy bars,
And Night puts on her golden crown
And fills the vases of the stars.
* * * * * * *

A hundred nights, a hundred days,
Nor folded cloud nor silken haze
Mellow the sun's midsummer blaze.
Along a brown and barren plain
In silence drags the wasted train;
The dust starts up beneath your tread,
Like angry ashes of the dead,
To blind you with a choking cloud
And wrap you in a yellow shroud.
There are no birds to sing your joy,
You have no joy for birds to sing,—
A hundred fangs your hearts destroy—
A thousand troubles fret and sting.
The desert mocks you all the while
With that dry shimmer of a smile
That dazzles on a bleaching skull,—

The bloom is withered on your cheek
You slowly move and lowly speak,
And every eye is dim and dull.
Alas, it is a lonesome land
Of bitter sage and barren sand
Under a bitter, barren sky
That never heard the robin sing,
Nor kissed the larks's exultant wing,
Nor breathed a rose's fragrant sigh!
A weary land—alas! alas!
The shadows of the vultures pass—
A spectral sign across your path;
The gaunt, gray wolf, with head askance
Throws back at you a scowling glance
Of cringing hate and coward wrath.
And like a wraith accursed and banned
Fades out before your lifted hand;
A dim, sad land, forgot, forsworn
By all bright life that may not mourn—
Acrazed with glist'ning ghosts of seas
In broideries of flower and trees,
And rivers, blue and cool, that seem
To ripple as in fevered dream—
Only to taunt the thirst, and fly
From withered lips and lurid eye.

A hundred days, a hundred nights—
The goal is farther than before,
And all the changing shades and lights
Are wrought in fancy's woof no more.
The sun is weary overhead,
And pallid deserts round you spread
A sorrowful eternity;
And if some grisly mountain here
Confront your march with forms of fear,
You turn aside and pass them by.
And all are overworn—the flesh
Is now a frayed and faded mesh
That will not mask the inward flame;
There is no longer any care
To round the speech, or speak men fair,
Or any gentle sense of shame;
The hearts of all are shifted through—
The grain drops through the windy husks
And false lights flick'ring round the true
Are quenched at last in dews and dusk.
And some are silent, some are loud
And rage like beasts among the crowd,—
And some are mild, and some are sharp
In word and deed, and snarl and carp,
And fret the camp with petty broils;
And some of temper, sweet and bland,
Do seem to bear a magic wand
That wins the secret of their toils—
Rare souls that waste like sandal-wood
In many a fragrant deed and mood;
And some invoke the wrath of God,

Or feign to kiss the burning rod,—
And some, may be, with better prayers,
Stand up in all their griefs and cares
And clinch their teeth, and do and die
Without a whine, a curse or cry.
And so the dust and grit and stain
Of travel wears into the grain;
And so the hearts and souls of men
Were darkly tried and tested then
That, in the happy after years,
When rainbows gild remembered tears,
Should any friend inquire of you
If such or such an one you knew—
I hear the answer, terse and grim,
"Ah, yes; I crossed the plains with him!"

And, lo! a moaning phantom stands,
To greet you in the lonely lands,
Among all lesser shadows, dight
With spoils of death; his meager hands
Salute you as you pass, and claim
The sacrifice that feeds his flame.
The march has broken into flight,
And wreck and ruin strew the road
The flaming phantom has bestrode;
The ox lies gasping in his yoke
Beside the wagon that he drew—
Where the forsaken campfires smoke
To hopeless skies of tawny blue;
And here are straight, still mounds that mark
The flight of life's delusive spark—
The somber points of pause that lie
So thick in human destiny.
And oh, so dark on this bleak page
Of drifting sand and dreary sage!
The sultry levels of the day,
The night with weird enchantment fills,
And frowning forests stretch away
Along the slopes of shadow hills;
And in the solemn stillness breaks
The wild-wolf music of the plain,
As if a deeper sorrow wakes
The dreary dead in that refrain
That swells and gathers like a wail
Of woe from Pluto's ebon pale,
And sinks in pulseless calm again.

A change at last!—an opal mist
Along the faint horizon's rim
Is banked against the amethyst
Of summer sky—so far, so dim,
You shade your eyes, and gaze and gaze,
Until there wavers into sight
A swinging, swaying strand of white,
And then the sapphire walls and towns
That breaks the light in quiv'ring showers

And float and fade in diamond haze;—
It is the mountains!—grand and calm
As God upon his awful throne;
They build you strength and breathe you balm,
For all their templed might of stone
Is our eternal sculptured psalm!
And now your western course is led
Where grassy pampas spread and spread
The pastures of the buffalo;
And like the sudden lash of foam
When tropic tempest smite the sea
And masts are stript to ward the blow—
A ragged whirl of dust described
Upon the prairie's sloping side
Portends a storm as swift and free,—
And lo, the herds—they come! they come!
A sweeping thunder cloud of life
Loud as Niagara, and grand
As they who rode with plume and brand
On Waterloo's red slope of strife;
Wild as the rush of tidal waves,
That roar among the crags and caves,
The trampling besom hurls along—
A black and bounding, fiery mass
That withers, as with flame, the grass—
O! terrible—ten thousand strong!
Meanwhile, the dusty teams are stopt,
The wagon tongues are deftly dropt,
And drivers by their oxen stand
And soothe them with soft speech and hand.
And yet, with horns tossed free, and eyes
Ablaze with purple depths of ire,
A thousand servile years expire
And flashes of old nature rise,
As if a sudden spirit woke
That would not brook the chain and yoke,—
And then, the stormy pageant past,
They bow their callous necks at last,
And with a heavy stride and slow,
The dreams of liberty forego.

Alas! it is a land of shades.
And mystic visions, swift alarms;
The fretted spirit flames and fades
With clanging calls to prayers or arms.
* * * The day is dying, and the sun
Hangs like a jewel rich with fire
In the deep west of your desire.
And o'er the wide plateau is rolled
A surge of crinkled sunset gold,
Bordered with shadows gray and dun.
A horseman with loose, waving hair,
Black as the blackest of despair,
Wheels into sight and gives you heed,
And on its haunches reins his steed,
All quivering like a river reed,

And sits him like a statue there,—
Transfigured in the sunset sea—
A bronze, bare sphynx of mystery!
A moment thus, in wonder lost,
His eagle plumes all backward tossed,
Then wheels again, as swift as wind,
The wild hair floating free behind.
And sunset's crinkled surges pour
Along an empty waste once more!
But you, since that fantastic shade
Across your desert path has played,
Distrust the very ground you tread,
And shiver with a nameless dread
Till stars drop crimson, and the sky
Is wan with heartless treachery.

* * * * * * *

For many days a form of white
Has flashed and faded in your sight
In fleeting glimpses, as of wings,
Our God's bright palm in beckonings.
It is a secret nursed of each—
You dare not give the thought in speech,
So wierdly solemn is the sign—
As if, upon the western stairs,
The angels of a thousand prayers
Were come with sacred bread and wine.
Again, the still, enchanted hour
Of sunset burns in crimson flower,
And purple-hearted shadows sleep
Like clustered pansies, warm and deep,
Eastward of wreathen crag and wall.
The road that wound and wound all day
In many a dark and devious way
At last with one swift curve ascends
A rolling plain that breaks and bends
Westward, till rosy curtains fall
O'er mountains massed and magical.
Resplendent as a pearly tent
Upon the fir-fringed battlement—
Serene in sunset gold and rose,
A pyramid of splendor glows,
So vast and calm and bright your dream
Is dust and ashes in its gleam.
A maiden speaks—"He led us far—
It is the golden western star!"
And then a youth—"Our goal is won—
'Tis the pavilion of the sun."
A gray sage, then, in undertone—
"It must be Hood, so grand and lone—
The shining citadel and throne
Of Terminus, that Roman god
Who marked the line that legions trod,
And set the limits of the world
Where Cæsar's battle flags were furled!
Oh, for the days of dark-eyed prophetess
Who sang in Syrian wilderness
The gilded chariots' overthrow,

To lead us for the cymbaled song
To him, the beautiful and strong,
Who dashed the brimming cup of woe
And was our cloud and flame so long!"

Forward! the crested mountains kneel
To patient toils of fire and steel—
A way is hewn and you emerge
Upon the Cascades' battled verge;—
And far beneath you and away
To ocean's shining fringe of foam
And summer vail of floating spray,
Behold the land of your emprise,
Serene as tender twilight skies
When day is swooning into gloam!
It is the morning twilight now
That wraps the valley's misted brow;
The bourgeoning and blooming dawn—
The reveille of Oregon.

How brightly on your vision, first
The pictured vales and woodlands burst,—
The lakelets set like twinkling gems
Along the prairies' pleated hems,—
The silver crooks and rippled sweeps
Of happy rivers here and there,
And many a waterfall that leaps
In rainbow garlands through the air,—
The skirted maples and the groves
Of oak the mild home-spirit loves—
Enameled plains and crenelled hills
And tangled skeins of brooks and rills,—
Imperial forests of the fir,
All redolent of musk and myrrh,
That fling and furl their banners old,
And still their gloomy secret hold
As Time his cloudy censer fills.

* * * * * * *

Where the foothills are wedded to the meadow
In the dimples that dally and pass
And the oak swings an indolent shadow
On the daisies that dial the grass.—
In the crescents of rivers; in hollows
Red-lipped in the strawberry time,
And the slope where the forests half follows,
A brooklet's melodious rhyme,—
On the sun-rippled knolls, and the prairies,
Beloved of the wandering kine—
In the skirts of the woodland the fairies
Embroidered with rose and with vine—
There's a tent, and a smoke that is curling
Above in the beautiful dome,
Like a guardian spirit unfurling
Soft wings o'er the temple of home.

And the ax of the woodman is ringing
All day in sylvestrian halls,
Where the chipmunk is playfully springing
And the blue-jay discordantly calls;
And the red chips are fitfully flying
On the asters that sprinkle the moss;
Where the beauty of summer is dying,
And the sun lances glimmer across;
There's a bird that is spectrally knocking,
On a pine that is withered and bare,
For the fir-top is trembling and rocking,
In the blue of the clear upper air—
There's a crackling of fiber—the crashing
Of a century crushed at a blow,
And the fir-trees are wringing and lashing
Their hands in a frenzy of woe!

A pheasant whirs up from the thicket
In the hush that comes after the fall,
And the squirrel retires to his wicket,
And the bluebird renounces his call;
And the panther lies crouched by the bowlder
In the gloom of the canyon anear,
And the brown bear looks over his shoulder,
And the buck blows a signal of fear;
But there's never a pause in your duty,
And the echoing ax is not still
As you waste with the green temples of beauty
For the puncheon and rafter and sill
That are wrought in a cabin so lowly
The trees will clasp hands over head,
But the heart calls it home, and the holy
Love-lights on its hearthstone are shed.

It is staunch and rough-hewn, and the ceiling
Of the fragrant red cedar is made,
With an edging of silver revealing
A picture of sunlight and shade.
And the Word has its place, not a trifle
Obscured in a pageant of books,
And above the broad mantle your rifle
Is hung on accessible hooks.
Oh, the freshness of hope and of fancy
That illumines the home and the heart,
With the grace of a bright necromancy
That excels the adorning of art!
And you rise and look forth and the glory
Of Hood is before you again,
And the sun weaves a gold-threaded story
In the purple of mountain and glen.

* * * * * * *

Stand up, and look out from the mansion
That adorns the old scene of the past
On the fruitage of hope—the expansion
Of the fruits of your vigils forecast!

While the shadows of Hood have been wheeling
Away from the face of the sun,
What a glamour of change has been stealing
On the fields that you painfully won!
Like the castles that fade at cock-crowing
The enchantments arise and advance
Where the cities of commerce are glowing
Like pearls in the braids of romance;
For a state, in the shimmering armor
Of the Pallas Athena has come,
And her ægis is fringen with the warmer
Refulgence that circles our home.

As for you, you are gray, and the thunder
Of the battle has smitten each brow
Where the freshness of youth was turned under
By Time's immemorial plow;
But the pictures of memory linger,
Like the shadows that turn to the East,
And will point with a tremulous finger
To the things that are perished and ceased;
For the trail and the foot-log have vanished,
The canoe is a song and a tale,
And flickering church spire has banished
The uncanny red man from the vale;
The cayuse is no longer in fashion—
He is gone—with a flutter of heels,
And the old wars are dead, and their passions
In the crystal of culture congeals;
And the wavering flare of the pitch light
That illumines your banquets no more,
Will return like a wandering witch-light
And uncrimson the fancies of yore—
When you dance the "Old Arkansaw" gaily
In brogans that had followed the bear,
And quaffed the delight of Castaly
From the fiddle that wailed like despair;
And so lightly you wrought with the hammer,
And so truly with ax and with plow—
And you blazed your own trails through the grammar,
As the record must fairly allow;
But you builded a state in whose arches
Shall be carven the deed and the name,
And posterity lengthens its marches
In the golden starlight of your fame!